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U.S. Spies: 'The Wraps Are Off'

By David Wise

WASHINGTON—A Mujahedeen insurgent in a remote mountain pass in Afghanistan receives a Soviet-made Kalashnikov rifle from captured American stocks. Halfway across the world, near Jalapa, Nicaragua, a former member of dictator Anastasio Somoza's national guard, now a member of the anti-Sandinista FDN, is issued an American-made grenade-launcher. In El Salvador, an election official stamps a woman's wrist with invisible ink to prevent her from voting more than once.

What all three have in common—the Afghan tribesman, the Somocista and the Salvadoran official—is that they received their weapons, and the invisible ink, from the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency. From all signs, under the Reagan Administration, the CIA has stepped up its covert operations around the globe, probably in number and certainly in size.

Even in Washington, the names of John H. Stein and Duane R. (Dewey) Clarridge are not household words, but both men have an important, albeit secret, impact on U.S. foreign policy. Stein heads the CIA directorate of operations, the intelligence agency's covert-action arm, and Clarridge is the CIA's top operative for Latin America. Under CIA director William J. Casey, who was Reagan's campaign manager in 1980, they help to direct America's secret wars, including the conflict in Nicaragua, the agency's most ambitious undertaking since the Bay of Pigs.

Congress has become increasingly restive about the covert operation in Nicaragua—an operation that is no longer very covert—but the increase in cloak-and-dagger activity should come as no surprise to the lawmakers, the press or the public. During the 1980 election campaign, Reagan promised to rebuild America's intelligence agencies, which he and his aides believed had been unnecessarily hobbled following the disclosures in the 1970s of widespread abuses by the spy agencies. The Republican Party platform specifically pledged to "improve U.S. intelligence capabilities for . . . covert action."

But the many millions of dollars of covert money being spent in Central America, and the increased emphasis on covert action in general, is only one part of a much larger picture. In general, the

Administration has moved on a broad front to unleash the intelligence agencies, particularly the CIA and the Federal Bureau of Investigation, to control sensitive information, and to crack down on government employees who leak to the press.

The President has done so through a series of executive orders and directives, as well as through the budget and legislation. Since taking office, he has issued a new executive order on intelligence, another on classification of documents and a recent directive to deal with news leaks. At the urging of the Administration, Congress has passed a law to bar the publication of the names of secret agents, and the FBI has issued a new set of guidelines that ease the restrictions placed on the bureau during the Ford Administration.

All of these actions have clearly been designed to mold the intelligence agencies to the Reagan design. "Each Administration in the last three has written a new executive order on intelligence," Michael J. O'Neil, chief counsel to the House Intelligence Committee, points out. "Intelligence has become a political issue. It wasn't before. The Church committee

*The Administration
Has Strengthened the
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national interest dictates." O'Neil, who serves under Chairman Edward P. Boland (D-Mass.) on the House panel—which has tried to restrain the Administration's operation in Central America—believes the debate over covert operations and intelligence is "almost theological," certainly ideological. "One of the things they wanted to make clear to intelligence officials is that they are trusted and can go about their duties, that they are not pariahs." He added: "I don't think in the long run there is really a great deal of difference between what Reagan and Carter permitted. But if you are an intelligence official looking at the atmospherics, the changes might tell you, 'The wraps are off.'"

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changed all that." (The Senate Intelligence Committee headed by former Democratic Sen. Frank Church of Idaho conducted the most far-reaching of the various investigations of the intelligence agencies carried out in the mid-1970s.)

During the 1980 campaign, O'Neil continued, both Reagan and Casey said they didn't have the capacity to conduct covert operations. "Clearly they set out to rebuild it," he said. "They wanted to be sure we have this form of policy tool when the